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**PANEL I**

**Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the field of education, health and work**

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**The important role of the United Nations**

It is impossible to imagine the progress that has been made towards gender equality during the last decades without the active involvement of the United Nations.

The International Women's Year in 1975 was inspired by the second wave of feminism that started in industrialized countries in the 1960s. The World Conference in Mexico City followed by the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-85) nourished the international connections among women. The United Nations was perhaps the most important resource a resource-poor social movement could have. At the same time, a dynamic and diverse international women's movement contributed actively to the work of the United Nations and the implementation of United Nations recommendations.

During the following decades, the United Nations kept an international spotlight on women, created national and international forums for action, encouraged women's groups and organizations, gave an impetus to gather and compare data, stimulated efforts towards gender equality, broadened the agenda for change and held Governments to account. The large international conferences in Mexico City, Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing played a key role, maintaining the issue of gender equality high on the international agenda, mobilising leaders from all over the world, galvanising media attention and providing women, who are rarely heard through established political channels, with a platform and a voice. Women used the opportunities to establish contacts and networks worldwide, build coalitions and experiment with new ways of managing the similarities and differences among themselves. However: diverse and dynamic as it is, the international women's movement is extremely vulnerable, often lacking space, recognition and resources, particularly in poor countries and authoritarian regimes. A recent survey conducted by the Association of Women in Development (AWID) in 2005 of women's groups and organizations worldwide showed that many receive less funding now than five years ago.

Many men actively support gender equality, but women's groups, networks and associations demanding empowerment of women, improvement in their status and participation of women and men on an equal footing in social, cultural, economic and political life, are needed to bring about change in existing gender relations. To keep moving forward, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of women's organizations, provide them with resources and give them a voice – at local, national and international level. Statistics show that much remains to be done worldwide to achieve gender equality.

At the international level, the United Nations must stay in the forefront and there is reason to discuss how the United Nations system can promote gender equality worldwide in a more effective way. In Norway, we are organizing a network for Women and the United Nations to help reinforce the role of the system. The under-representation of women, at senior level in particular, in the United Nations system as a whole is a reason for concern. Specialized agencies, programmes and funds also need to contribute more to the empowerment of women and gender equality across the whole range of their policies and programmes. In addition, special bodies dealing with women's issues should be strengthened. They should not be expected to take a main responsibility for gender mainstreaming, but have important roles giving women a more audible voice, increasing their influence and promoting their interests in development and peace efforts. The organization of large regional or thematic women's conferences should further be considered to bring issues forward, attract media coverage and hold Governments to account.

### **Women in political office**

I have been requested to focus my statement on women's employment and participation in decision-making.

Governments have a crucial role, not only improving the situation of women, but also creating conditions conducive for women's participation and equal voice in decision-making processes.

National politics have during the last half century been dominated by men all over the world. In this sense, it is amazing how similar the political institutions are in spite of historical, cultural and social differences from one country to the other. The Nordic countries have been in the lead, increasing the participation of women in political office. We have had the advantage of a relatively high level of socioeconomic development with extensive education and employment for women as well as relatively egalitarian social and cultural traditions. But an active women's movement combined with political institutions that did not present too serious obstacles to the inclusion of women, were key to the progress that has been achieved.

Socio-economic, cultural and political factors all influence the participation of women in political decision-making. Political rights and civil freedoms are basic. There must be qualified women who are motivated to engage in formal politics, and attitudes must be such that they – as well as men – are accepted as political actors. Finally, the political system must not be too adverse. It is a widespread experience that proportional electoral systems generally are more favourable for the representation of women than majority systems. In addition, special measures may facilitate the access of women.

In my own country, Norway, the introduction of quotas was crucial. They were controversial, but have been extremely effective in improving the gender balance in decision-making bodies. We started using quotas in the political parties in the 1970s, when there were around 15 per cent women in Parliament and local councils. Women both within and outside the political parties demanded more resolute support of women in politics. My own party began tentatively suggesting at least 25 per cent women among candidates for local councils, but soon raised the quota to a minimum of one third and then 40 per cent. A representation of at least 40 per cent was also required in the governing bodies of the party. We were two small parties starting to use quotas, but we set a standard. When the largest party, the Labour Party,

adopted a 40 per cent quota in 1983, it was a breakthrough. Even parties to the right that were against quotas, felt pressured to increase the representation of women. It became an area of political competition. The share of women in political bodies increased rapidly, passing 30 per cent in Parliament and the local councils by the mid-1980s. But subsequently the representation has stagnated. Today, we have 38 per cent women in Parliament and 36 per cent in the local councils. Only the cabinet has passed the 40 percent milestone. The world got the first cabinet with a female Head of Government and 40 per cent female ministers in 1986, with Gro Harlem Brundtland as the Prime Minister. Since then the share of women in the Norwegian cabinet has never been below 40 percent, though the parties in power have changed. Today we have achieved a new record of 50/50 men and women.

Proud as we are of the composition of the Cabinet, we are discussing how to move forward to further increase the representation of women in other political bodies. Maybe we can benefit from experiences of others. Many developing countries have traditional political systems where women have powerful positions, and during recent years different kinds of quota provisions have been introduced, increasing the role of women in political office in a notable way. Countries such as Rwanda, Belgium, Costa Rica, Argentina, Guyana, Mozambique, South Africa and others have seen an amazingly fast development in the share of women in Parliament – challenging the traditional Nordic lead. This is most exciting and I hope they will share their experiences with us.

### **Participation at both executive and grass roots levels**

In spite of progress in some countries, the general picture of women's representation in political decision-making is not very encouraging. The increase of women in Parliament and ministerial posts has been steady, but uneven and very slow. Totally, there still are around six times as many men as women in these important positions. In 2005, only 20 Parliaments and 17 cabinets have reached the target of 30 per cent women. This has been considered a "critical mass" to bring about change. However, recent research questions this assumption. Important as it is to increase the share of women, a certain number does not automatically make the institutional culture, policies and priorities more women-friendly. Processes of change depend on the local conditions: the political system, the institution and the actors – women as well as men – both within and outside of the formal political institutions.

The number of women Heads of State or Government around the world has increased markedly during recent years. Though they are relatively few in numbers, national female leaders have become a global phenomenon. In fact, 50 countries – or one fourth of the independent nation states – have had one or more female top leaders during the last half-century. From 1945 to 1989, there were a total of 20 female Presidents and Prime Ministers, but the number more than doubled during the following years. From 1990 to 2006, 50 women got a top position at the national level. Their access to power is important. They provide new role models, and though they might be controversial as women and as leaders, they prove that women are capable of being national executives. But our expectations with regards to what they can achieve, particularly with regards to women's interests, must be realistic. In many cases, the female national leaders did not obtain the most important executive position in their country, and they often exercised their functions only for a short period of time. Their possibilities for bringing about women-friendly changes were further limited by the fact that they usually were more or less alone as women in very male dominated political hierarchies. They were elected or appointed first of all to implement a party or national agenda, rarely to

promote women's interests. Some gained top positions replacing male relatives, while others advanced on men's terms in male dominated parties.

Women national leaders can be important agents for change, but to be able to influence policies and priorities in a woman-friendly direction, they need support from women (and men) both inside and outside of the formal political institutions demanding change. With a female Prime Minister and 40 per cent women in the cabinet in Norway some things could begin to happen. The quota of 40 per cent was established by a political party, where women were playing an active role and women's interests were reflected in the party policies. The challenge for many political parties around the world is to become more women-friendly and inclusive, not only appreciate women as members, but also elect them in political office. At the end of the 1990s, most of the parties globally were without women in their governing body. Further, the formal political institutions need to be more open to informal politics, where women often are more active, supporting issues of importance to women.

The participation of women in decision-making positions becomes particularly topical in situations of crisis and armed conflict. Security Council resolution 1325 has become a milestone in the efforts of the international community to gain acceptance for the role of women in relation to peace and security. The resolution has inspired women in countries like Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Congo, Liberia, Rwanda and Sudan, but much still remains to be done before women play a central role in peace processes and peace building efforts. The action plan of the United Nations Secretary General is promising and Norway is elaborating an action plan of its own to follow up. The United Nations must take the lead in promoting the participation of women in peace negotiations, Constitutional commissions, political bodies in conflict areas and electoral processes. The participation of women is not only a question of rights. It is necessary to ensure a just peace and establish more democratic institutions. Peace processes present a critical juncture providing unique opportunities for increasing women's participation in political bodies. The use of quotas might also here be a useful instrument.

### **Women in economic decision-making**

In my country, women have been doing better entering decision-making bodies in political than in economic institutions and better in the public than the private sector. Being half of the electorate, women can press for reform in political institutions, and the public sector is more susceptible to political concerns than the private sector. A quota of a minimum of 40 percent has led to 44 per cent women in public boards, councils and committees. Simple quotas are usually not applicable in employment, but efforts to combat discriminatory practices and encourage the promotion of women have led to 35 percent female leaders in the State administration. In the private sector, however, only 22 per cent of the top leaders are women. In the media there are only 18 per cent female editors and white, middle aged, middle class, economically active men dominate the media picture.

Trying to influence developments in the private sector, as the first Nordic country, the Norwegian Centre-right Government initiated a law in 2003 requiring the participation of at least 40 per cent of each gender in the executive boards of private corporations. Subsequently, the representation of women increased, but not very much. In 2005, there were only 17 per cent women among board members. So the present Centre-left Government has now decided to be tough. The corporations have to comply with the quota within two years.

Otherwise, they risk sanctions such as enforced liquidation. It is very exciting to see what will happen now.

The use of quotas is an example of affirmative action to promote gender equality. But such measures are not always accepted. Norway encountered problems with the European Free Trade Association when it was decided to earmark positions for female University professors to improve the gender balance. Only 16 percent of the professors were women. But EFTA went against, emphasising that the measure entailed a distortion of the competition for the posts. We are struggling to find other ways of promoting gender balance. It is clear, however, that you cannot in many cases improve the status of women and benefit from their competence without changing rules of the game that traditionally have favoured men and often still do. Other ways of proceeding must be introduced, often in the form of affirmative action.

### **Poor working women**

The working conditions of women worldwide have been altered partly dramatically during recent decades and will be further altered in the future due to changes in the international economic operations and environmental conditions. It is extremely urgent to improve the management of the global economy and the environment, and the United Nations must play a key role. The challenge is to increase the knowledge and understanding of the global economy, analyse ways of promoting better and fairer management and introduce global rules to guide or regulate priorities and action of international economic institutions. Particular emphasis should be on measures to prevent or reduce negative repercussions of globalization and liberalization on poor countries and poor people; reducing disparities and improving living standards, closing gender income gaps and ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for all. Increased emphasis and additional efforts are also required to make production and consumption environmentally sustainable in both industrialized and developing countries. It is of particular urgency to halt or reduce the climate change, the deterioration of soil and water and the depletion of fisheries, forests and biodiversity. These developments threaten the global environment, but the negative consequences will hit poor and exposed populations, not least women, the hardest. It is not possible to enter into details here. Suffice it to emphasize the importance of including women's concerns in policies and programmes. Otherwise the environment for gender equality may become less enabling and the situation for vulnerable women more critical.

Though the Secretary-General's report on an enabling environment (E/CN.6/2006/12) deals briefly with poor working women, the recommendations relating to work, constructive as they are, lack a focus on poor working women. Globalization has brought new opportunities for well-educated workers, but has deepened insecurity and poverty for others, including women, who lack the skills to compete or the means to acquire them. Instead of informal work becoming formalised, work is moving from formal to informal, regulated to unregulated, and workers are losing job security, medical and other benefits. A growing share of the workforce in both developed and developing countries is not covered by employment-based social and legal protection. Women workers are not only concentrated in the informal economy, they are in the more precarious forms of informal employment, where earnings are the most unreliable and the most meagre. This has consequences not only for their own health and well-being, but also that of their families. Many children, not least girls, are forced to work, often under precarious conditions, to help the family earn a living.

Most of the poor women live in rural areas, often engaged in subsistence agriculture. In many poor countries agriculture has a dominating position, but development of the sector in general and of women farmers in particular has been neglected to a large extent. Comprehensive measures are required in many cases to improve the macroeconomic conditions for agriculture, the accessibility to markets, the technology, methods of production and quality of products as well as the protection of the environment. Special attention must be given to women cultivating under difficult circumstances with limited access to resources. Both in rural, peri-urban and urban areas women are engaged in micro and small-scale enterprises to earn an income, but conditions are often unfavourable. The women have unequal access to productive resources and services, including finance and skill upgrading. Some legal provisions make it difficult for women to take initiatives for business development and their reproductive roles put them in a disadvantaged position. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has proposed a “bottom-up growth strategy” to encourage the activities of women entrepreneurs.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has just published a special report on “Women, work and poverty” demanding a favourable policy environment and specific interventions in order to increase economic opportunities, social protection and a representative voice for the poor, especially women, in the informal economy. Besides the transformation of basic structures that perpetuate gender equality, the report recommends that the organizing of informal women workers should be supported, along with unions and member-based worker’s organizations, to obtain labour rights, legal and social protection. Gender-sensitive, disaggregated statistics on national labour forces must be elaborated as a basis for appropriate policies in support of informal workers and greater efforts must be made to deliver services to self-employed workers, improve access to credits and financial markets and mobilize demands for their products and services.

### **Reproductive health for all**

Without good health and a relevant education women are unable to work and earn a decent living. Sexual and reproductive health is of particular importance. Without squarely addressing this issue, not only is the survival of young girls and women at stake, but also their development and contribution to society in all areas. Otherwise, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be reached.

The United Nations has an impressive history from the 1940s bringing up population issues and stimulating learning processes aimed at changing attitudes and standpoints. The world conferences formed a cohesive series of events, including diverse points of view, bringing groups onto the international arena that otherwise would not be heard, debating various proposals and achieving a political consensus. It is striking to which extent agreement actually was reached with Governments worldwide in the course of the years. The 2005 World Summit reconfirmed the commitment to universal access to reproductive health by 2015, integrating the goal into the MDG strategies. It is urgent for Governments and the United Nations system in collaboration with civil society organizations and private donors to reinforce action to achieve the goal. Nearly half a million girls and women die annually in connection with pregnancy and birth, though the causes of the deaths are largely avoidable. For every woman who dies, between 30 and 100 suffer from serious injuries, often painful and long-lasting. Further, the AIDS pandemic cannot be halted without providing women with the right to protect themselves and the possibilities to do so. At the same time, health

services in poor countries are being weakened in many places by the withholding of vital funding and the prohibition of effective action. Sexual and reproductive health must be placed at the centre of the development agenda with a substantial scaling-up of efforts in a worldwide campaign to ensure the health of women and girls.

### **Financing for gender equality**

Promoting gender equality requires not only political will and effective strategies, but also adequate funding. Funds are needed for analytical work, catalytic activities and innovative efforts to promote gender mainstreaming. Funds are also needed for targeted policies and programmes that empower women and improve their status. Funds must be allocated from national Governments, United Nations entities and donors, the private sector and civil society organizations. But how should funds be allocated?

Gender mainstreaming has become a broadly accepted strategy, but there is reason to take a closer look at how it is working in practice. The way it is often understood and implemented, it evidently does not give the expected results. Many Governments as well as multilateral organizations share the experience of Norway: that we are not succeeding in our ambition of integrating women and gender concerns in all policy and planning, programmes and development efforts.

Norwegian development cooperation is an example of the problems we encounter. We have just carried out an evaluation of Norway's bilateral collaboration (NORAD, 2005). We adopted a special strategy for women and gender equality for the period 1997-2005. In addition to individual projects directed towards women, it was emphasized that equal rights and opportunities for women and men must be integrated into all aspects of development cooperation. Gender became a crosscutting issue in the development cooperation budget. As a consequence, women and gender equality disappeared as a main priority area and the special allocations for women vanished. There was no comprehensive overview of planned actions and no reporting on the total contribution of Norwegian assistance to the promotion of women and gender equality in developing countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the bilateral aid agency NORAD each had only one full time and one part-time adviser to follow-up the gender strategy.

The evaluation underlines that political commitment at the top levels of the organization is extremely important, but not sufficient to ensure support for gender equality. In Norwegian development cooperation the challenge is still – after years of support in principle for gender equality – to move from policies and goals to programmes and operations. The evaluators encountered problems in their work due to a lack of documentation, but they noted that a number of actions were undertaken. They were fragmented, however, often ad hoc and the effects were unknown. The most visible actions related among others to girls' education, forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), trafficking, and the participation of women in peacekeeping operations. Overall, the efforts to promote women and gender equality were limited. Of all bilateral funds in 2004, only 22 percent had this as a principal or subsidiary goal. To improve performance, the evaluation stated that action related to women and gender equality had to be properly institutionalized and operationalized. It is recommended that human resources and organizational arrangements relating to the issue must be strengthened, funding ensured for analytic and innovative work as well as skills and capacity-building, both in partner countries and in Norway, training programmes expanded and reporting improved. Specific work should be



done on how to open up the possibilities for addressing women and gender equality in new aid modalities and joint country-level dialogue. Here Norway should learn from other countries.

There are many reasons for the inadequacies of the Norwegian efforts. The promotion of gender equality does not happen by itself. There are many kinds of resistance. To overcome the obstacles, a systematic involvement in the issues on the part of the political leadership is necessary, but not always forthcoming. In addition, the strategy of mainstreaming is often misunderstood and not implemented in the right way. There is confusion with regards to goals and means. The goals are gender equality and women's empowerment. To achieve the goals, different strategies and actions are needed, according to circumstances. Mainstreaming is an important strategy. But women must not be lost in the mainstream, or "male stream" as critics would say. Targeted women-specific policies, programmes and projects are necessary to strengthen the status of women and promote mainstreaming. The United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) operates with a "three-pronged strategy", which is elucidating. It includes a) mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policy-planning, programming, implementation and evaluation activities, b) promoting the participation of women at all levels and fields of activity, giving particular attention to women's own priorities and perspectives in redefining both the goals and means of development, and c) specific programmes and activities for the benefit of girls and women, particularly those that promote equality, endogenous capacity-building and full citizenship (UNESCO, 28 C/4, para 227). Often it is expected that mainstreaming will happen all by itself, without necessary measures and resources. This is a complete misunderstanding. There must be resources, specialist support, institutional mechanisms and accountability.

The problems experienced in Norway with regards to the promotion of woman and gender equality in development assistance are not unique. Many bilateral and multilateral donors encounter similar challenges. According to a recent survey, of the total net disbursements of Official Development Assistance in 2003 (in the amount of USD 69 billion) roughly 2.5 billion (3.6 per cent) had gender equality as a significant or principal objective (AWID 2005).

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has taken account of the evaluation and is now revising its strategy for women and gender equality. The issue will no longer be crosscutting, but an overarching political objective. The concern will be institutionalized with increased visibility, accountability, monitoring and reporting. An important basis for the efforts will be the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which acknowledges that women's rights and gender equality entail changes in existing gender relations and power structures. The efforts to promote women and gender equality will entail a wide range of different activities. Human and financial resources will be increased and there will be more emphasis on capacity-building, training and research. Learning from the experience of others will help improve the impact of the Norwegian efforts.